

Secretary Rusk's News Conference of March 1

Press release 138 dated March 2

Secretary Rusk: I would like to open today with a statement on Viet-Nam. We have noted recent comments from Peiping, Moscow, and Hanoi about the nature and purposes of American aid to Viet-Nam. I should like, therefore, to make a brief comment on that situation.

Communist Aggression Against Viet-Nam

These comments from Communist capitals wholly neglect the fact that the Republic of Viet-Nam is under attack of Communist guerrillas who are directed, trained, supplied, and reinforced by North Viet-Nam—all in gross violation of the 1954 Geneva Accords.¹ Irrefutable evidence of this illegal and aggressive activity has been made public; I can add that what is known publicly is strongly and conclusively reinforced by intelligence information.

United States military and economic assistance and technical advice are being extended to the Republic of Viet-Nam at its request to assist the Vietnamese people to maintain their independence against this aggression.² There have been other examples, in almost every continent, of this type of aggression.

The United States is assisting with training, logistics, transportation, and advisory personnel to enable the Government of Viet-Nam to deal with this conspiratorial effort to take over that country by violent means. We have no combat units in that country, and we have no desire for bases or other United States military advantages. All we want is that the Vietnamese be free to determine their own future.

In reference to the demand by the Communists

¹ For text, see *American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents*, vol. I, Department of State publication 6446, p. 750.

² For an exchange of messages between President Kennedy and President Ngo Dinh Diem, see *BULLETIN* of Jan. 1, 1962, p. 13.

that the cochairmen of the 1954 Geneva conference and other countries concerned consult regarding Viet-Nam, the United States is always prepared to talk about situations which represent a threat to the peace, but what must be talked about is the root of the trouble; in this case it is the Communist aggression against Viet-Nam in disregard of the Geneva Accords.

The President made it clear last December in responding to the Vietnamese request for assistance that

... our primary purpose is to help your people maintain their independence. If the Communist authorities in North Viet-Nam will stop their campaign to destroy the Republic of Viet-Nam, the measures we are taking to assist your defense efforts will no longer be necessary.

There is no threat to the peace of Southeast Asia from the south or from across the Pacific Ocean; the threat comes only from the north, from those who have declared their intention to force the rest of the world into their pattern—despite the fact that no people has yet chosen that pattern in a genuinely free election. There can be peace overnight in Viet-Nam if those responsible for the aggression wish peace. The situation is just as simple as that.

Foreign Service Retirement Benefits

I might comment quite informally on some discussions which have occurred with respect to the Foreign Service and the effect of a law which makes certain additional retirement benefits available up to May 31st of this year, a law which was passed, I think, in 1960. We have not had a rush of applications for retirement to take advantage of this law from among our senior and competent Foreign Service officers, although there will be some who will undoubtedly take this particular provision of law into account when they consider their own personal situation. For example, in the case of some individuals who are considering this problem, if you wish to consider it in terms of

work has been going on. I don't think that we will go to Geneva unprepared. Of course, as you move to an actual meeting the pace of preparation steps up, and I will be working on it very hard and in the hope and expectation that I will be going.

Talks With NATO Allies Concerning Cuba

Q. Mr. Secretary, could you say, sir, something about the success which the administration has had in its talks with the NATO allies about aligning their policy on Cuba with that of the United States?

A. I think that particular point has been elevated in importance perhaps beyond the world situation. It has been for many months the practice in NATO to get a full report on important matters that go on in other parts of the world which are not the specific and immediate business of NATO. In this instance we had an important conference at Punta del Este,¹⁰ and our colleagues in NATO had expressed the hope that we could have someone who was present at Punta del Este come over and give them a full report on the discussions and the situation. We sent Walt Rostow, a senior and competent officer of assistant secretary rank, who was at Punta del Este, for that purpose. We did tell NATO members what the Organization of American States had done, and we expressed the hope that NATO members would take into account the attitudes of the OAS, as expressed at Punta del Este, in the formulation of their own policies toward Cuba.

For example there was a unanimous declaration by the inter-American countries that steps ought to be taken to interfere with the trade and traffic in arms to Cuba or from Cuba. We would hope that our friends in NATO would align their policies with that sort of provision. This was a part of what has come to be a fairly normal procedure in making a full explanation to NATO about what is going on in other parts of the world. We have done that with respect to Southeast Asia and other matters.

Q. Mr. Secretary, this is a question on tactical nuclear weapons, and I understand from Army sources that one of the best capsule weapons is the demolition explosion of the nuclear type, and I know it is in use in exercises in NATO. I am

wondering if we have any inhibitions about using tactical nuclear weapons in guerrilla warfare in Viet-Nam.

A. Well, I would not suppose that nuclear weapons are a counter guerrilla weapon of high priority or that they are likely to be used in this situation. I don't fit nuclear weapons into the problem of Viet-Nam in this situation.

Q. These are just landmines. They are not any bigger than that.

A. Just low nuclear landmines? (Laughter.) No, those are not contemplated. I would make that very clear.

Q. Mr. Secretary, could you tell us what pleased you and what gave you some concern in the report of the Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy]?

A. Concern? Or are you simply speculating?

The Attorney General's trip¹¹ was most worthwhile. I will be having lunch with him today, and we will be going over it in detail. I did talk with him a little while immediately upon his return late yesterday. Our reports from all of the countries and the capitals that he visited were most positive. There is no doubt whatever that his visit was of very great help to all of us in our foreign policy and in our relations with the countries he had a chance to see.

No Specific Form for Talks on Viet-Nam

Q. Mr. Secretary, in your opening statement you said the United States was always willing to talk about the Vietnamese situation. What sort of talks do you think would be most fruitful? For example, would a second round of the 1954 Geneva talks do any good with the United States?

A. I do not have in mind any specific form of talk. The message that we want to get across to the other side in the face of these comments and declarations that they have made through various channels is that there is no problem about peace in Viet-Nam if they will simply decide to leave it alone. It is just as simple as that. We have no ambitions of a national sort ourselves. We can think of a great many other things to do with our resources or our manpower than the task we have undertaken to assist the Government of South

¹⁰ For background, see *ibid.*, Feb. 19, 1962, p. 270.

¹¹ For announcements concerning Mr. Kennedy's trip, see *ibid.*, Jan. 8, 1962, p. 50, and Jan. 15, 1962, p. 90.